UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/2066
24 January 1996

W E D N E S D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Security Council calls on Somali political leaders to return to inclusive negotiations; condemns violence against humanitarian workers.

* Secretary-General prepares for talks with Iraq on "food for oil" formula, as humanitarian agencies report millions of Iraqis at severe nutritional risk.

* Secretary-General recommends extension of UNOMIL mandate until 31 May; says peace process in Liberia at critical juncture.

* United Nations proposes $70.5 million programme to repair environmental damage in countries hosting Rwandan refugees.

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The Security Council today said it was deeply concerned about the absence of any credible progress towards national reconciliation in Somalia. In a statement by its President, Sir John Weston (United Kingdom), the Council called on all Somali political leaders and parties to return to inclusive consultations and negotiations, which would lead to the establishment of a broad-based national government.

The Council urged Somali faction leaders to reject violence and place the interests of the country and people above their personal differences and ambitions. While expressing appreciation for the efforts of various regional organizations and neighboring States to promote dialogue, it said that the Somali people were ultimately responsible for achieving national reconciliation and restoring peace.

The Council condemned the harassment, beatings abductions and killings of international humanitarian personnel in Somalia and underlined that all Somali parties were responsible for ensuring the security of the personnel. The delivery of humanitarian assistance was crucial to overall security and stability, the Council said and called on Somali parties and factions to open Mogadishu's main port and other transportation facilities unconditionally. It

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reminded States of their obligation to fully implement the military embargo against Somalia and called on them to refrain from any actions which might exacerbate the situation. The Council supported the Secretary-General's intention to maintain the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS).

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The Secretary-General will soon propose a date to Iraq for the first round of talks on the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995), according to a United Nations spokesman. The resolution allows Iraq to sell a limited amount of oil -- $1 billion over 90 days -- to purchase badly needed medicine and food. The Secretary-General has reviewed steps with his senior advisors on how to implement the "oil-for-food formula", she said, emphasizing that there would be no "quick fix." Discussions would be incredibly technical and difficult and would take time. There would be no easy solutions.

The Secretary-General was focusing an enormous amount of time and energy on the talks because of the desperate humanitarian situation in Iraq, the spokesman continued. Humanitarian agencies trying to function in the country had reported "alarming food shortages". An entire generation of Iraqi children were being irreparably damaged.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 4 million people, or one fifth of Iraq's population, including 2.4 million children under five years of age and 600,000 pregnant and nursing mothers, were at severe nutritional risk, the spokesman said. Deaths from malnutrition had increased eight fold since 1989. A sample of children in Baghdad found 28 per cent were stunted and 29 per cent underweight. In hospitals, badly nourished children were dying from colds or bronchitis, she said. A month's supply of food for a family of five cost around $26, when the average monthly wage was $3 to $5 and a university professor earned $9 a month.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) be extended until 31 May. In a report to the Security Council dated 23 January, he said the situation could then be reviewed, keeping in mind that, under the Abuja Agreement, elections were scheduled before the end of August. The Agreement also called for the disengagement of forces by 26 September 1995 and for full disarmament to start on 1 December. However, that schedule underestimated delays to ensuring combatants were ready to participate in the disarmament and demobilization process.

The peace process in Liberia was at a critical juncture and the full support of all concerned was required to overcome recent setbacks, the Secretary-General said. He urged the faction leaders to ensure their forces observed the cease-fire, disengaged without further delay and cooperated with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring the Observer Group (ECOMOG) and UNOMIL to initiate disarmament and demobilization as soon as possible.

The Secretary-General urged the Liberian National Transitional Government to support those efforts and play an active role to ensure that the Liberian factions cooperated with ECOMOG and UNOMIL. He also called on the international community to provide the necessary resources to enable ECOMOG to carry out its responsibilities effectively, since the continued lack of support could jeopardize implementation of the Abuja Agreement

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The United Nations today proposed a $70.5 million programme to repair damage to the environment and infrastructure in countries hosting Rwandan refugees. The portfolio of projects will involve efforts to stop environmental damage, including an end to unregulated wood-cutting in the refugee camps; reforestation; rehabilitation of roads, ports and communication facilities and sanitation, and poverty alleviation and income generation. The projects are designed to be implemented rapidly and will complement other activities already under way.

The Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for Africa, Kamal Morjane, said he hoped the international community would support the projects which acknowledged the generosity of the asylum countries. The initiative was vital to help repair the ravages of a massive human tragedy which affected the lives of many people, not only in Rwanda, but in neighbouring countries as well, he said. The projects were presented to a technical meeting of donors in Geneva, which was called by the UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

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